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Swiss intelligence defenseless against huge KGB intrusion

By Andrew Borowiec
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GENEVA — Soviet spies have infiltrated neutral Switzerland on a massive scale, with more KGB agents in this Alpine country than anywhere else in Europe, according to a surprise admission by Swiss intelligence services yesterday.

They confirmed figures cited by French author and journalist Thierry Walton that there were an estimated 700 Soviet agents and at least twice as many locally recruited Swiss "moles" or "sleepers" whose tasks include possible cooperation with special Soviet troops known as "Spetsnaz."

Such troops prepared the ground for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Officials in the capital of Bern quoted by the conservative daily "Tribune de Geneve" agreed that the degree of infiltration was higher than elsewhere in Europe and said

Switzerland lacked the means to combat it.

Mr. Walton, who disclosed Soviet penetration of French intelligence services in a book titled "The KGB in France" last year, divulged the Swiss figures at a seminar attended by some of Switzerland's leading intelligence officials and repeated them in an interview with the Tribune de Geneve.

His disclosures were headlined "Soviet spies prefer Switzerland." The article explained that the country's counterespionage service — which has only 36 agents and 60 analysts — could do little to combat the Soviets, forcing the federal government to resort to unpublicized expulsions of Soviet citizens.

There are, at any given time, some 2,000 Soviet citizens in Switzerland, most of them working in Geneva's international organizations. Of these 700, or about one third, are described as full-time spies.

They are backed by the intelligence services of such Soviet bloc

countries as East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, which also have relatively large numbers of legally recruited United Nations employees here.

Mr. Walton was quoted as saying that Switzerland's attraction for the Soviet Union was in its character as an "international crossroads," through which a myriad military, economic and industrial secrets pass daily.

"For the time being, Moscow is mostly seeking to obtain information and samples that would allow it to reduce the technological gap," Mr. Walton was quoted as saying. Switzerland, as such, he added, interests the Soviets "no more and no less" than other countries.

According to Swiss experts, the Soviets also have been placing students in several institutions of higher learning "not to spy, but to befriend future officials and prepare their psychological analyses."

Switzerland, according to Mr. Walton, is the only country besides the United States that has four Soviet "residents," or chief spies — one each for the KGB and the military intelligence agency GRU in both Geneva and Bern.

Commenting on Mr. Walton's statements, the Tribune de Geneve explained that since 1948 some 200 spy cases involving Soviet citizens have been exposed here, followed by 150 expulsions.

In most cases the Swiss Department of the Interior preferred a minimum of publicity. Mr. Walton sharply criticized this policy, saying that public exposure with a maximum of details "combats disinformation and alerts the population."

Mr. Walton added: "Let's not be paranoid, there are certainly no KGB agents under your bed. . . . But it is essential to be lucid, to realize that the Soviet Union relentlessly craves power, that it considers itself to be a country at war with the rest of the world, and that the KGB is one of its main pillars."